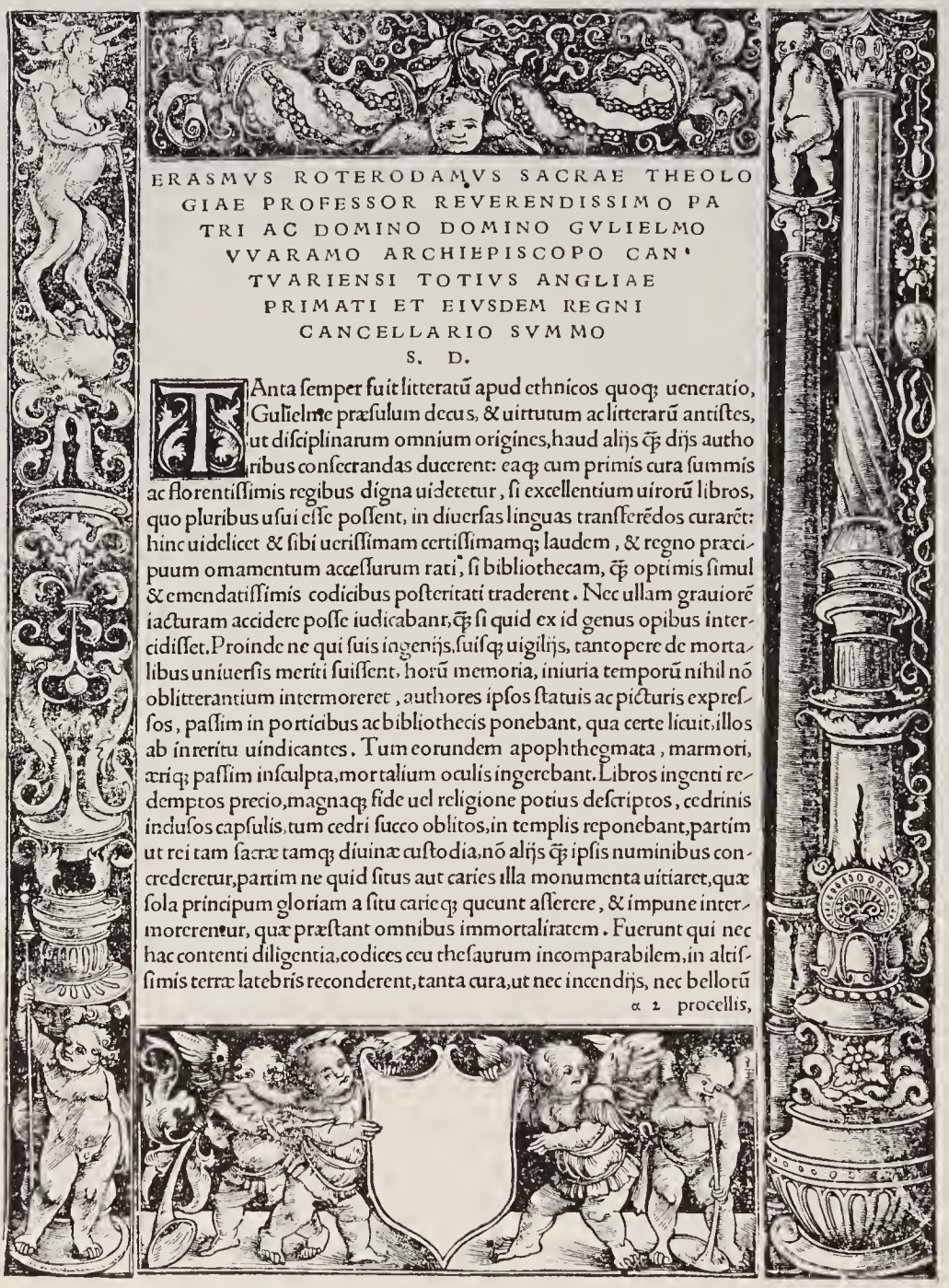

ERASMVS ROTERODAMVS SACRAE THEOLO
GIAE PROFESSOR REVERENDISSIMO PA
TRI AC DOMINO DOMINO GVLIELMO
VVARAMO ARCHIEPISCOPO CAN'
TVARIENSI TOTIVS ANGLIAE
PRIMATI ET EIVSDEM REGNI
CANCELLARIO SVMMO
S. D.

TAnta semper fuit litteratũ apud ethnicos quoq; ueneratio, Gulielme præsulum decus, & uirtutum ac litterarũ antistes, ut disciplinarum omnium origines, haud alijs q̃ dijs autho tribus consecrandas ducerent: eaq; cum primis cura summis ac florentissimis regibus digna uidetetur, si excellentium uirorũ libros, quo pluribus usui esse possent, in diuersas linguas transferẽdos curarẽt: hinc uidelicet & sibi uerissimam certissimamq; laudem, & regno præcipuum ornamentum accessurum rati, si bibliothecam, q̃ optimis simul & emendatissimis codicibus posteritati traderent. Nec ullam grauiorẽ iacturam accidere posse iudicabant, q̃ si quid ex id genus opibus intercidisset. Proinde ne qui suis ingenijs, suisq; uigilijs, tantopere de mortalibus uniuersis meriti fuissent, horũ memoria, iniuria temporũ nihil nõ oblitterantium intermoreret, authores ipsos statuis ac picturis expressos, passim in porticibus ac bibliothecis ponebant, qua certe licuit, illos ab interitu uindicantes. Tum eorundem apophthegmata, marmori, æriq; passim insculpta, mortalium oculis ingerebant. Libros ingenti redemptos precio, magnaq; fide uel religione potius descriptos, cedrinis inclusos capsulis, tum cedri succo oblitos, in templis reponebant, partim ut rei tam sacræ tamq; diuinæ custodia, nõ alijs q̃ ipsis numinibus crederetur, partim ne quid situs aut caries illa monumenta uitiaret, quæ sola principum gloriam a situ carieq; queunt asserere, & impune intermorerentur, quæ præstant omnibus immortalitatem. Fuerunt qui nec hac contenti diligentia, codices ceu thesaurum incomparabilem, in altissimis terræ latebris reconderent, tanta cura, ut nec incendijs, nec bellorũ

Dedicatory letter, Erasmus to William Warham, Ep 396
Hieronymi opera 1 (Basel: Froben 1516)
Öffentliche Bibliothek, University of Basel

Erasmus' dedicatory letter to Archbishop William Warham of Canterbury, primate of England and lord chancellor of the realm, serves as the general preface to the edition of Jerome. Warham (1456?–1532) had been archbishop of Canterbury since 1503 and lord chancellor since 1504, although Cardinal Wolsey had succeeded him in the latter office at the end of 1515, a change Erasmus apparently was unaware of when he wrote this dedication. Erasmus first met him during his second visit to England in 1505, and he dedicated to him at that time his translation of Euripides' *Hecuba* (Ep 188) and subsequently his translation of Euripides' *Iphigenia* (Ep 208). Warham remained a warm friend and a generous patron. In 1512 he granted Erasmus a yearly pension from a parochial benefice at Aldington in Kent (See Allen Ep 255 introduction). The dedication is a mark of Erasmus' high regard for and gratitude to the English prelate. He had originally thought of offering the edition to Pope Leo X, but more appropriately he dedicated the Greek and Latin New Testament, which appeared earlier that year, to the Roman pontiff. These two remarkable works, which are so closely related, thus appeared under the protection and auspices of men of the highest authority.

We have discussed this dedication in our introduction. Suffice it to say here that Erasmus presents a justification for his edition of Jerome as well as a panegyric of the saint's superior qualities as a Christian scholar and author. He also recounts the story of his long and difficult labours in editing and restoring the text of Jerome's works and briefly describes the first four volumes of the edition, which he had taken as his special province. The letter is an apt and informative introduction to the great work that follows.

The dedicatory letter is Ep 396 in Allen and CWE.

DEDICATORY LETTER

ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM, DOCTOR OF DIVINITY,
TO THE MOST REVEREND FATHER AND LORD, WILLIAM WARHAM,
ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, PRIMATE OF ALL ENGLAND
AND LORD HIGH CHANCELLOR OF THE SAID REALM,
GREETING

So great was the veneration always accorded to literature even by pagans, William, paragon of prelates and champion of the virtues and of sound learning, that they supposed the origins of all the liberal arts should be ascribed to the gods alone as their inventors, and the most powerful and prosperous monarchs thought no concern more becoming to them than to arrange for the translation of works of outstanding authors into various tongues, that more men might enjoy them. This was, they thought, the way to secure the truest and most lasting renown for themselves and a special ornament for their kingdoms, if they bequeathed to posterity a library equipped with most accurate copies of the very best authors; nor did they think a more serious loss could befall them than the destruction of any of their riches in this kind. They were concerned therefore that the memory of those whose gifted natures and whose exertions had done so much for the whole human race should never succumb to the attacks of time that effaces all things; and so they placed statues and pictures of the authors themselves everywhere in cloister and library, to protect them from oblivion at least as far as in them lay. Further, they had the maxims of great authors inscribed everywhere in marble or bronze and set them up for all men to see; they bought their works at vast expense and had them faithfully and almost religiously copied, enclosed them in chests of cedar wood and rubbed them with cedar oil, then laid them up in their temples. For this there were two reasons: something so sacred, so divine, should not be entrusted for safekeeping to any but the gods themselves, and no neglect or decay must be allowed to spoil the only monuments which can keep neglect and decay from the glory of princes, nor should works be allowed to die defenceless which confer immortality on all men.

For some even this degree of care was not enough, and they laid up their books like some incomparable treasure in storehouses deep under ground, intending by these precautions to protect them from destruction by fire or by the storms of war, which so often confound everything sacred and profane, that they might survive at least for the benefit of posterity. They

perceived of course, those princes distinguished no less for wisdom than for royal state, that it was barbarous for the corpses of the dead to be so carefully embalmed sometimes with unguents and spices and woad to preserve them from decay, when their preservation served no purpose since they could no longer reproduce the features or figure of the deceased, which even a statue of stone can do, and to take no such care to preserve the relics of the mind. And so they thought it far more appropriate to transfer that solicitude to the books of great men, in which they live on for the world at large even after death, and live on in such fashion that they speak to more people and more effectively dead than alive. They converse with us, instruct us, tell us what to do and what not to do, give us advice and encouragement and consolation as loyally and as readily as anyone can. In fact, they then most truly come alive for us when they themselves have ceased to live. For such is my opinion: if a man had lived in familiar converse with Cicero (to take him as an example) for several years, he will know less of Cicero than they do who by constant reading of what he wrote converse with his spirit every day.

Now if such honour was paid even to works of superstition like the books of Numa and the Sibyl,[1] or to volumes of human history as was customary in Egypt, or to those that enshrined some part of human wisdom such as the works of Plato and Aristotle, how much more appropriate that Christian princes and bishops should do likewise by preserving the writings of men inspired by the Holy Spirit, who have left us not so much books as sacred oracles! And yet somehow it happened that in that field our ancestors did singularly little. We may not think much, I grant you, of the loss of pagan authors, the only result of which is that we are less well informed or less eloquent, but not less virtuous. But think of the admirable and really saintly authors bequeathed to us by Greece, that seat of learning, or its rival Italy, by Gaul, once such a flourishing home of culture, or Africa with all its originality, or Spain with its tradition of hard work. How impressive was their recondite learning, how brilliant their eloquence, how holy their lives! And yet, I ask you, how few of them survive, preserved more by accident than by any help from us! And those survivors, how foully mutilated, how badly adulterated, how full throughout of monstrous errors, so that to survive in that condition was no great privilege! For my part, far as I am from despising the simple piety of common folk, I cannot but wonder at the absurd judgment of the multitude. The slippers of the saints and their drivel-stained napkins we put to our lips, and the books they wrote, the most sacred and most powerful relics of those holy men, we leave to lie neglected. A scrap of a saint's tunic or shirt we place in a gilded and bejewelled reliquary, and the books into which they put so much work, and

in which we have the best part of them still living and breathing, we abandon to be gnawed at will by bug, worm, and cockroach.

Nor is it hard to guess the reason for this. Once the character of princes had quite degenerated into a barbaric form of tyranny, and bishops had begun to love their lay lordships more than the duty of teaching bequeathed to them by the apostles, the whole business of instruction was soon abandoned to a certain class, who today claim charity and religion as their private trademark; sound learning began to be neglected, and a knowledge of Greek, still more of Hebrew, was looked down on; to study the art of expression was despised, and Latin itself so much contaminated with an ever-changing barbarism that Latin by now was the last thing it resembled. History, geography, antiquities, all were dropped. Literature was reduced to a few sophistic niceties, and the sum of human learning began to be found only in certain summary compilers and makers of excerpts, whose impudence stood in inverse proportion to their knowledge. And so they easily allowed those old classic authors to fall out of use or, what is more like the truth, they deliberately contrived their disappearance, for they now read them in vain, lacking all things necessary for their understanding. They did, however, make a few haphazard extracts from them which they mingled with their own notes; and this made it even more in their interest that the old authors should disappear, to save them from the charge of plagiarism or ignorance. It was worth their while for Clement, Irenaeus, Polycarp, Origen, Arnobius to fall out of use, that in their stead the world might read Occam, Durandus, Capreolus, Lyra, Burgensis,[2] and even poorer stuff than that. So under their long and despotic rule such was the holocaust of humane literature and good authors that a man who had meddled even slightly with sound learning was expelled from the ranks of the doctors.

The result of this was the total loss of so many luminaries of the world, whose names alone survive and cannot be read without tears; and if by some chance any have escaped destruction, they are damaged in so many ways and so much mutilated and adulterated that those who perished outright might seem fortunate. Now this seems to me a perfectly monstrous fate for all learned authors, but far more monstrous in Jerome than anywhere else, whose many outstanding gifts deserved that he, even if no one else, should be preserved complete and uncorrupted. Other authors have each a different claim upon us; Jerome alone possesses, united in one package, as the phrase goes, and to a remarkable degree, all the gifts that we admire separately in others. Distinction in one department is a great and rare achievement; but he combined overall excellence with being easily first in everything separately, if you compare him with other authors, while if you compare him with himself, nothing stands out, such is his balanced

mingling of all the supreme qualities. If you assay his mental endowments, where else would you find such an enthusiastic student, such a keen critic, such prolific originality? What could be more ingenious or diverting, if the subject should call for something entertaining? If however you are looking for brilliance of expression, on that side at least Jerome leaves all Christian authors so far behind him that one cannot compare with him even those who spent their whole time on nothing but the art of writing; and so impossible is it to find any writer of our faith to compare with him that in my opinion Cicero himself, by universal consent the leading light of Roman eloquence, is surpassed by him in some of the qualities of a good style, as I shall show at greater length in his life. For my part, I have the same experience with Jerome that I used to have with Cicero: if I compare him with any other author, however brilliant, that man suddenly seems as it were to lose his voice, and he whose language has no rival in my admiration, when set alongside Jerome for comparison, seems to become tongue-tied and stammers. If you demand learning, I ask you, whom can Greece produce with all her erudition, so perfect in every department of knowledge, that he might be matched against Jerome? Who ever so successfully united every part of the sum of knowledge in such perfection? Was there ever an individual expert in so many languages? Who ever achieved such familiarity with history, geography, and antiquities? Who ever became so equally and completely at home in all literature, both sacred and profane? If you look to his memory, never was there an author, ancient or modern, who was not at his immediate disposal. Was there a corner of Holy Scripture or anything so recondite or diverse that he could not produce it, as it were, cash down? As for his industry, who ever either read or wrote so many volumes? Who had the whole of Scripture by heart, as he had, drinking it in, digesting it, turning it over and over, pondering upon it? Who expended so much effort in every branch of learning? And if you contemplate his lofty character, who breathes the spirit of Christ more vividly? Who has taught him with more enthusiasm? Who ever followed him more exactly in his way of life? This man, single-handed, could represent the Latin world, either for holiness of life or for mastery of theology, if only he survived complete and undamaged.

As it is, I doubt whether any author has had more outrageous treatment. A good part of all he wrote has perished. What survives was not so much corrupted as virtually destroyed and defaced, and this partly by the fault of illiterate scribes whose habit it is to copy an accurate text inaccurately and make a faulty text worse, to leave out what they cannot read and to corrupt what they do not understand – for instance, the Hebrew and Greek words which Jerome often brings in; but in a much more criminal fashion by

sacrilegious men, I know not whom, who have deliberately cut down very many passages, added some, altered many, corrupted, adulterated, and muddled almost everything, so that there is hardly a paragraph which an educated man can read without stumbling. What is more (and this is the most pestilential way of ruining a text), as though it were not enough to have put together so many idiotic blunders, showing equally ignorance and inability to write, under the name of one who is equally a great scholar and a great stylist, they have mixed in their own rubbish into his expositions in such a way that no one can separate them. Ascribe a book to the wrong author, and there are many indications that this is wrong; but if scraps are intermingled, like darnel in wheat, where is the sieve that can screen them out? That all this has happened I shall shortly demonstrate in the catalogue of Jerome's works, and in the two prefaces and critical introductions of the second volume.[3]

I was roused therefore, partly by this insufferable ill-treatment of so eminent a Doctor of the church, on whose immortal works these worse than Calydonian boars[4] have wreaked their fury unpunished, and partly by thoughts of the general advantage of all who wish to learn, whom I saw debarred by these outrages from enjoying such a feast – I was roused, I say, to restore to the best of my ability the volumes of his letters, which were the richest in learning and eloquence and proportionately the worst corrupted, although I well knew how difficult and arduous was the task I took in hand. To begin with, the labour of comparing together so many volumes is very tedious, as they know who have experience of working in this treadmill. Often too I had to work with volumes which it was no easy business to read, the forms of the script being either obscured by decay and neglect, or half eaten away and mutilated by worm and beetle, or written in the fashion of Goths or Lombards, so that even to learn the letter-forms I had to go back to school; not to mention for the moment that the actual task of detecting, of smelling out as it were, anything that does not sound like a true and genuine reading requires a man in my opinion who is well informed, quick-witted, and alert. But on top of this far the most difficult thing is either to conjecture from corruptions of different kinds what the author wrote, or to guess the original reading on the basis of such fragments and vestiges of the shapes of the script as may survive. And further, while this is always extremely difficult, it is outstandingly so in the works of Jerome. There are several reasons for this. One is that his actual style is far from ordinary, starred with epigrams, highlighted with exclamations, rich in devious and cunning artifice, in pressing close-packed argument, in humorous allusions, sometimes seeming to use all the tricks of the rhetorical schools without restraint, and everywhere exhibiting the highly skilled craftsman. As a result, the

further his style is from the understanding of ordinary people, the more blunders it is defiled with. One man copies not what he reads but what he thinks he understands; another supposes everything he does not understand to be corrupt, and changes the text as he thinks best, following no guide but his own imagination; a third detects perhaps that the text is corrupt, but while trying to emend it with an unambitious conjecture he introduces two mistakes in place of one, and while trying to cure a slight wound inflicts one that is incurable.

Besides all this, there is the astonishing way in which Jerome mixes material of the most varied kinds. He even went out of his way to do this, but with complete success. It was a kind of ambition and ostentation, if you like, but of a pious and holy kind: to display his own resources with the object of shocking us out of our lethargy and awaking his drowsy readers to study the inner meaning of the Scriptures. There is no class of author anywhere and no kind of literature which he does not use whenever he likes – sprinkling here and there, pressing harder, ramming it home: Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Chaldaean, sacred and profane, old and new, everything! Like a bee that flies from flower to flower, he collected the best of everything to make the honey stored in his works;[5] he plucked different blossoms from every quarter to adorn his chaplet; he put together his mosaic out of tesserae of every colour. And of all these it was the most recondite materials that he habitually wove in with the greatest readiness. There is nothing so obscure in the meaning-within-meaning of the Prophets, in the hidden senses of the whole Old Testament, in the Gospels or the Epistles, that he does not use as though it were familiar, sometimes with such a sidelong glance that only a well-instructed and attentive reader will catch the allusion. What is there in the literature of the Hebrews or Chaldaeans, in rhetorical or geographical textbooks, in poetry and medicine and philosophy, and even in books written by heretics, from which he does not draw thread to weave into his book? To understand all this, encyclopaedic learning is essential, even if the texts were faultless; and what happens, do you suppose, when everything is so damaged, so mutilated, so muddled that, if Jerome himself came to life again, he would neither recognize his own work nor understand it?

And then there was a further handicap. The greatest part of the authors upon whom Jerome drew as his sources have perished, and with their support it might have been possible to repair somehow the results of repeated damage or even loss: for this is, as it were, the sheet-anchor in which scholars normally take refuge in their greatest difficulties. For since I did not undertake this labour to secure either reputation or reward, I at least was not so much moved by something that might perhaps have deterred another man from setting his hand to any business of the kind. What is that?

you will ask. I mean this: no other work brings a man more tedium and weariness, and equally no work brings its author less repute or gratitude, because, while the whole advantage of one's exertions is enjoyed by one's reader, he fails to appreciate not only how hard one has worked for his benefit but even how much he has gained, unless someone by chance were to compare my work with the texts in current use. The reader wanders at leisure over smiling fields; he plays and runs and never stumbles; and he never gives a thought to the time and tedium it has cost me to battle with the thorns and briars, while I was clearing that land for his benefit. He does not reckon how long a single brief word may sometimes have tormented the man trying to correct it, nor does he bring to mind how much I suffered in my efforts to remove anything that might hold him up, how great the discomforts that secured his comfort, how much tedium was the price of his finding nothing tedious.

But I shall be tedious myself if I recount all the tedium I have endured in this affair; so let me say just one thing, which is bold, but true. I believe that the writing of his books cost Jerome less effort than I spent in the restoring of them, and their birth meant fewer nightly vigils for him than their rebirth for me. The rest any man may conjecture for himself. Why need I mention here the ingratitude and ignorance of some men I could name, who would rather have no changes whatever in the text of the best authors? They do nothing themselves, and object noisily to the distinguished efforts of others; men whose judgment is so crass that they find errors in what is perfectly preserved and stylish elegance in the foulest corruptions, and (what is worse) of such perversity that, while they do not grant scholars the right to correct a faulty text by hard work, they allow some worthless fellow to befoul and stultify and ruin the works of the greatest authors at his own sweet will without a protest. And so it is inevitable that one should earn no gratitude from the majority and win the resentment of this last class of men even for the service one has done them. You may say that profit means nothing to the noble soul, and that honour and glory are easily despised by the good Christian. Yes: but even men of the highest character look for gratitude if they have deserved it. Who can tolerate scandal and abuse in return for doing good?

Of all this I was well aware; but I was moved by a great desire to rescue Jerome, by the thought of being useful to those who have the Scriptures at heart, and last but not least because your Highness approved and would have it so, and you above all others gave me the impulse and unflagging encouragement to undertake this. And so I despised all the difficulties, and like a modern Hercules I set out on my most laborious but most glorious campaign, taking the field almost unaided against all the monsters of error. I

cannot think that Hercules consumed as much energy in taming a few monsters as I did in abolishing so many thousand blunders. And I conceive that not a little more advantage will accrue to the world from my work than from his labours which are on the lips of all men. To start with, by comparing many copies, early copies especially, and sometimes adding my conjectures as the traces of the script suggested, I have removed the blunders and restored the correct reading. The Greek words, which had been either omitted or wrongly supplied, I have replaced. I have done the same with the Hebrew also; but in this department what I was less able to manage for myself I have achieved with the assistance of others, and especially of the brothers Amerbach, Bruno, Basilius, and Bonifacius, whom their excellent father Johannes Amerbach equipped with the three tongues as though they were born expressly for the revival of ancient texts. And in this they have even outstripped their father's wishes and expectations, thinking nothing more important than the glory of Jerome and for his sake sparing neither expense nor health. For my part I was very grateful for their help, having only dipped into Hebrew rather than learnt it. And yet I saw to it that the keen reader should find nothing lacking even if I lacked it myself, and what fell short in my own capacity has been fully supplied out of the resources of others. Why should I be ashamed to do in the defence of such an author what the greatest monarchs do without shame in the recovery, and even the destruction, of paltry towns?

I have added a summary to each treatise or letter, opening the door, as it were, to those who wish to enter. And then, since not everyone is blessed with such wide linguistic and literary knowledge, I have thrown light on anything that might hold up a reader of modest attainments by adding notes, hoping to achieve a double purpose: first, to make such an eminent author, who hitherto could not be read even by men of great learning, accessible to those whose learning is but small, and second, that it may not be so easy in future for anyone to corrupt what other men have restored. Not content with this, the pieces wrongly circulating under Jerome's name, many of them such that their author is clearly not Jerome but some botcher as witless as he is impudent, I have not cut out, in order that a reader whose appetite is greater than his taste might run no risk of disappointment (to put it more bluntly, so that every donkey may find its thistle[6]), but exiled to a suitable place, although in themselves they deserve no place at all. Next, I divided the whole corpus (I speak of the section which I took for my own province) into four volumes. In the first I have grouped together his pieces of moral instruction by exhortation and example, because what deals with the ordering of life deserves attention first. The second I have divided into three classes, into the first of which I have put certain things that show some

degree of culture and are worth reading, but are falsely ascribed to Jerome; into the next, things which are not his, but carry an author's name in their headings; the third class is a kind of cesspool into which I have thrown the supremely worthless rubbish of some impostor, I know not whom, of whom it may fairly be doubted which is the greater, his inability to write, his ignorance, or his impudence. At least, whoever he was, he seems to me to deserve public execration for the rest of time; and he must have had a very low opinion of the intelligence of posterity if he hoped that there would never be anyone who could distinguish the ravings of a half-witted noisy fellow from the works of a man of the highest eloquence, learning, and sanctity. The third volume I have allotted to his works of controversy and apologetics, those, that is, which are devoted to refuting the errors of heretics and the calumnies of his opponents. The fourth I have kept for the expository works, I mean the explanations of Holy Scripture.

With something of the same zealous intentions I have lately produced a New Covenant equipped with my annotations, and I decided that the dedication of that work should be shared by Leo the supreme pontiff and your Highness, that my new undertaking might come before the public protected and recommended by the names of the whole world's two greatest men. But Jerome, recalled to the light from some sort of nether region, I prefer to dedicate to you alone, either because I owe you without exception everything I have, or because you always have a special concern for Jerome's reputation, perceiving with your usual wisdom that after the writings of the evangelists and apostles there is nothing more deserving of a Christian's attention. For my part I would gladly believe that Jerome himself takes some pleasure in the thought that his restoration to life in the world has the authority of your most favourable name, for he is no more the greatest of theologians than you are second to none among bishops whom all admire. He mastered to such good effect the whole cycle of knowledge in its completeness, and you likewise have blended in a wonderful harmony the full circle of a bishop's virtues.

In all other respects the agreement is admirable. I have one anxiety, that my limited powers may fail to do justice to Jerome's importance or to your eminent position; for nowhere do I feel more clearly how small my talent is than when I am striving to make some sort of response to your exalted virtues and your unbounded goodness to me. But what was I to do, bound to you as I am by so many and such great obligations that if I sold myself into slavery I should not be in a position to repay any part of my debt? I have done what bankrupts often do, making a token payment to bind themselves yet more irrecoverably, and thus proving that it is the means and not the will they lack; they are ill-starred rather than dishonest debtors, and

for this very reason often secure the good will of a jury, because they are not so much ungrateful as unfortunate. In such cases the only means of showing gratitude is to be a frank and cheerful debtor, and to acknowledge one's debt is the first step towards paying it. Or rather, to compare a situation even more like mine, I have followed the example of those who would rather raise a fresh loan than go to prison for nonpayment, and have borrowed from Jerome the wherewithal to repay you. Though why should it any longer look like something borrowed rather than my own? – real estate often passes from one ownership to another by occupation or prescriptive right. In any case, in this line of business Jerome himself has laid down a principle for me in his preface to the books of Kings, repeatedly calling that work his, because anything that we have made our own by correcting, reading, constant devotion, we can fairly claim is ours.[7] On this principle why should not I myself claim a proprietary right in the works of Jerome? For centuries they had been treated as abandoned goods; I entered upon them as something ownerless, and by incalculable efforts reclaimed them for all devotees of the true theology.

It is a river of gold, a well-stocked library, that a man acquires who possesses Jerome and nothing else. He does not possess him, on the other hand, if his text is like what used to be in circulation, all confusion and impurity. Not that I would dare assert that none of the old corruptions, no traces of his previous ruined state, remain; I doubt if Jerome himself could achieve that without the aid of better manuscripts than I have yet had the chance to use. But this with all my zeal I have achieved, that not many now remain. And if I have done nothing else, at least my attempt will spur on some other men not to accept hereafter indiscriminately whatever they may find in their books, however badly corrupted by one impostor after another or masquerading under some false title, and read it and approve it and cite it as an oracle. I only wish that all good scholars would devote all their forces to the task of restoring as far as possible to its original purity whatever in the way of good authors has somehow survived after such numerous shipwrecks! But I should not like to see anyone enter this field who is not as well equipped with honesty, accuracy, judgment, and readiness to take pains as he is with erudition; for there is no more cruel enemy of good literature than the man who sets out to correct it half-instructed, half-asleep, hasty, and of unsound judgment.

If only all princes were of the same mind as you – if they would let go these wars with all their madness and their misery, and devote themselves to the task of adorning their generation with the arts of peace, firing the zeal of learned men to these most salutary labours by suitable rewards! Very soon we should see all the world over what has come to pass in these few

years in your native England. For many years she has been strong in manhood and in wealth; and lately she has become so well endowed, has achieved such distinction, and so blossomed forth in religion, justice, gracious living, and last but not least in all the study of the classics (and all this your doing!), that this remote island can serve as a spur even to the most civilized regions in their pursuit of the highest things.

Farewell in Christ Jesus, most illustrious prelate, and may he preserve you in health and wealth as long as possible for the increase of religion and the advancement of humane studies.

Basel, 1 April 1516